

ASSEMBLY BILL NO. 3410

To the General Assembly:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Assembly Bill No. 3410 without my approval.

This bill seeks to remove the family cap from the Work First New Jersey program. Work First New Jersey, New Jersey's welfare reform program, provides cash assistance to low-income families and individuals. For families, this assistance is administered through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ("TANF") program. When a family applies for benefits, its benefit is calculated based on the number of family members. However, a cap is in place to limit increases in benefits once a family unit is already receiving them. Such a limitation serves to equalize treatment of Work First recipients and other residents of the State who do not automatically receive higher incomes following the birth of a child.

This bill would fundamentally alter that parity by allowing Work First New Jersey recipients to collect additional benefits for a child conceived while already receiving benefits. While I want to ensure those individuals most in need have assistance available to them, New Jersey already recognizes an important exception to the family cap where a parent in the household is working. This exception appropriately balances the purpose of the family cap with the larger purpose of the Work First program to end dependency on public assistance by offering people the support and tools necessary to find a job and maintain long term employment.

Additionally, Work First New Jersey beneficiaries may be eligible for other important assistance, including food and nutrition supplies through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and WIC; housing assistance through the State Rental Assistance Program or Section 8 voucher program; energy assistance through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program; and medical assistance through Medicaid and NJ FamilyCare.

I will continue to support programs that provide assistance to those individuals most in need. However, I will not sign a bill that will alter the carefully constructed balance between assistance and equity reflected by the family cap.

Accordingly, I herewith return Assembly Bill No. 3410 without my approval.

[seal]

Respectfully,
/s/ Chris Christie
Governor

Attest:

/s/ Thomas P. Scrivo
Chief Counsel to the Governor